



GEORGIA COMMISSION ON THE HOLOCAUST

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Meghan McNeeley Biography

Meghan McNeeley has been teaching eighth grade English at Clarke Middle School in Athens, Georgia since 2000. A graduate of the University of Georgia College of Education with a degree in Middle School Education, Meghan was trained to be a middle school math teacher, but found her initial teaching position in her secondary content, English, first. It became very quickly apparent that English literature, language arts and grammar were the subjects Ms. McNeeley was meant to teach.

As a second year teacher, Meghan began what would be a decade-long position as Team Leader for her grade. In her third year at Clarke Middle School and her first year of eligibility, Meghan won Teacher of the Year for her school. Soon thereafter, she was nominated for several other recognitions through Clarke County's Foundation for Excellence – Freida Thomas Teacher of Promise in 2004, Teacher of Excellence in 2005 and again in 2006.

In 2004 Meghan was inspired to return to the University of Georgia for a graduate degree by her involvement in the Red Clay Writing Project, where she attended the summer institute, became a member of the steering committee, and lobbied for the National Writing Project in Washington, DC in the springs of 2005 and 2006. She graduated with a master's degree from the College of Education's Language and Literacy Program with a degree in Children's Literature and Language Arts in 2008.

While leading her school team, helping steer the Red Clay Writing Project, and lobbying in Washington, DC, Meghan's dedication to her classroom and her students never wavered. It was during this busy and hectic time in her early career that Meghan discovered her deep passion for Holocaust education.

She had always taught the Holocaust; *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, was in the eighth grade literature textbook and required in the school district. Initially, Meghan found herself in a difficult position for any teacher – students had many, many questions about the Holocaust that she could not answer. Looking to satisfy the students' curiosity as well as her own, Meghan began to read, watch, and learn all she could on the Holocaust. The Holocaust unit grew from two weeks to six, and reading expanded far beyond the

readings in the literature textbook. In 2005 she attended the Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Conference for Educators at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and in 2006 she became a Museum Teacher Fellow for the same museum.

Since becoming a Museum Teacher Fellow (MTF) with the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, Meghan's experiences with Holocaust education have expanded greatly. Her initial task with the MTF was to write an exemplary lesson for the Museum with two other MTFs – both high school history teachers; one from Batesville, Mississippi, and the other from Lexington, South Carolina. The lesson developed by Meghan, Laura Boughton, and Cynthia Capers was entitled "The Road to Auschwitz" and is intended to expose students in grades six through twelve, in either an English or history classroom, to the history, the laws, and the bystanders of the Holocaust through a timeline study, an activity with anti-Jewish decrees, and primary source photograph analyses. Since its inception, Meghan has taught this lesson to many teachers across the United States – in California, Washington, DC, Arizona, Mississippi, Texas, and Atlanta, as well as teaching lessons on Holocaust literature.

In 2009 she attended the Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teachers' Program (part of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and their Descendants) where she and approximately 30 other educators visited Holocaust sites in Poland, such as Auschwitz, Belzec, and Treblinka, and Israel. In March 2012 she was selected as one of ten Museum Teacher Fellows to attend the Holocaust Teachers' Summit in Poland, sponsored by the Embassy of Poland in Washington, DC. The trip included visits to important Holocaust related sites, as well as Polish cultural and historical sites, and most importantly, American and Polish teachers collaborated on Holocaust education initiatives.

Last, but not least, this 2012-2013 school year brought great recognition to Meghan McNeeley for all her work in Holocaust education. In November 2012 she was recognized as WXIA-TV's "Class Act" teacher and her classroom was broadcast on the 11 Alive News, and this past March, Ms. McNeeley discovered that she had been selected by the Anne Frank Center in New York City for the Spirit of Anne Frank Outstanding Educator Award.

"The recognition and the accomplishments I have received over the years never detract from the real reason for my work – my students. I wish to answer kids' questions about the Holocaust, but more importantly, I want students to discover themselves through the lessons of the Holocaust. Can they see their own cruelty reflected? Can they see the effects of their own actions or inaction? By witnessing the injustice and the inhumanity in the Holocaust, and in a smaller way, in themselves, can I help them to change? Empathy can replace apathy; racist remarks can become obsolete; ignorance can become wisdom. If students see and feel the inhumanity of the Holocaust (or the Jim Crow South, or the Civil Rights Movement or any other era I teach), and thus, change for the better (and many others have) then I would know I contributed to making the world, and its people, a little kinder. I teach Anne Frank, her experiences, and her diary to nurture growth and development of our children, our future. With help from the immortal words of Anne Frank, I teach them to be voices for change, advocates for justice, foes of discrimination, and fighters for peace. I teach a generation to find meaning in Anne Frank's eloquent expression: 'Human greatness does not lie in wealth or power, but in

character and goodness. People are just people, and all people have faults and shortcomings, but all of us are born with a basic goodness.””